

4475. J. 6. 115
A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

PORTMAN CHAPEL,

APRIL 19th, 1793,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A

GENERAL FAST,

By the Revd. SERVINGTON SAVERY,

RECTOR of HICKHAM, LINCOLNSHIRE,

AND JOINT MORNING PREACHER AT PORTMAN CHAPEL.

SERVINGTON SAVERY
L O N D O N :

Printed for J. ROBSON, Bookseller, New Bond-Street, and C. DILLY, Poultry.

S E R I E

AT CENCAERS

FOR T M A N C H A P E L

1703 1704 1705 1706 1707

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A

T R A T



2. 10. 1948

ВНЕШНЕГО МИНИСТЕРСТВА

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

Printed by TROSON & SONS, 10, New Bond Street, and G. DILLY, London.

TO THE

Congregation

AT

PORTMAN CHAPEL,

THIS

S E R M O N,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR DEVOTED,

HUMBLE SERVANT,

SERVINGTON SAVERY.

TO THE

Congregation

AT

PORTMAN CHAPEL,

THIS

S E R M O N

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR DEVOTED,

HUMBLE SERVANT,

SERINGTON SAVERY

ISAIAH: CHAP. 26. VERSE. 9.

WHEN THY JUDGMENTS ARE IN THE EARTH, THE INHABITANTS
OF THE WORLD WILL LEARN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

IT is a lamentable argument of the depravity of human nature, that men are often led to the practice of duty more from the miseries that are entailed on vice and wickedness, than from any natural love of virtue, or disinterested motives of reason: From the same corrupt principle, “the riches of divine goodness” through the source of every blessing and enjoyment we are capable of, often pass by us unobserved, and the experience of sorrow and calamity from the hand of our Almighty Father seems necessary to rouse us from the lethargy of sinful indulgence or transgression, and wake the mind to a lively sense of moral and religious duty. Hence the Psalmist in speaking of the rebellious children of Israel remarks, that though they enjoyed every

every divine blessing and protection from God; though he had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the bread of Heaven; yet for all this “they sinned still, and were not estranged from their lusts:” But when he flew them in his wrath, then they sought him and returned, and they remembered that God was their rock, and that the high God was their Redeemer.” And hence also arose the natural and well founded reflection of the holy prophet in the text.—“When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”

But in contemplating the judgments of the Almighty on earth, it will be more profitable, and better adapted to the solemn occasion on which we are assembled together, to fix our attention on some of the ordinary dispensations of Providence, than to consider those miraculous operations of Divine Power, which punished the obdurate Jews, and awed them to obedience; for that intemperance should produce disease; idleness, poverty; ungoverned passions; in justice, violence or oppression; that the abuse of liberty should ever be the parent of anarchy and confusion; in a word, that vice of every kind should lead to misery, while virtue in all its forms should be productive of happiness, is no less a judgment of God on earth, than the most stupendous works of his

his power. The difference only is, that the one is more common and familiar than the other, and therefore less observed. The former may resemble the sun that daily enlivens the world; the latter may be considered as the earthquake, or occasional volcano, (that) desolates the surrounding country, and strikes the people with dismay.

Among these ordinary dispensations of omniscience, let us direct our attention to a subject that seems, at this time, more particularly to claim it, *I mean War*, and in meditating on this scourge of nations, this crying sin of human nature, and enormous engine of mischief and destruction, let us view God's "judgments in the earth, and as inhabitants of the world learn "righteousness." A judgment doubtless it is proceeding as invariably from vice and folly as any other effect whatever; and so shocked is human nature at its extensive miseries and devastations, so ashamed is man, in his individual capacity, of its oppressions to the innocent, and the cruelty and injustice of its principle altogether, that though we are unavoidably forced to share in its violence by the outrages and crimes of others, there is still a striking propriety in assembling ourselves thus publicly to deprecate the wrath of Heaven, to confess, with the deepest humility and contrition, our manifold sins and transgressions, and to supplicate

PLICATE the merciful interpositions of Divine Power for the restoration of peace.

It is true, every one will acknowledge (and we hope it will be some extenuation of its evils in the fight of God) that the present is a war, on our part, merely defensive. No corrupt ambition, no wicked schemes of aggrandisement, no plans of conquest, and no paltry contention about dominion, has prevailed on the English nation to take up arms: nor can we be charged, I trust, with any base, intriguing arts of policy to foment divisions, or to spread the havoc of battle, that we might share its spoils. On the contrary, we have endeavoured by every peaceable effort to suppress its violence, and our gracious sovereign it is well known personally interposed to prevent the commission of that enormous crime, which has filled all Europe, from the prince to the peasant, with pity and indignation: while his subjects, with a liberality that does honor to the christian name, have by their voluntary contributions protected the wretched exiles that throng our streets (though standing almost in the same relation to them as the Jews to the Samaritans) and furnished them with food and raiment. The sword of British justice is

at

at present, what every Christian always will wish it to be, “ a
 “ weapon of defence;” but it is not drawn to claim a useless
 privilege, to vindicate an idle insult, or retain a distant colony;
 it is to defend our religion, government, and laws; to stop the
 violence of unexampled wickedness; to preserve our very phy-
 sical and political existence; in short, to guard the dearest
 rights of humanity; to save our children from the contamina-
 tion of atrocious guilt, and ourselves from utter destruction:
 for the history of the world cannot exhibit such another
 war, whether we consider it in its causes, its progress, or
 the objects which it professes to obtain.

It arose, however, naturally enough from those indefinite no-
 tions of right and wrong, when applied to government, which
 require a degree of superior virtue and superior wisdom not to
 abuse, that would supersede the necessity of all government;
 and yet these maxims of speculative perfection were thought
 competent, without even the common sanctions of laws, to re-
 gulate men of the most insolent and ungovernable passions, and
 of the most abandoned principles--Men who could embrace
 their hands in blood with seeming complacency and delight--
 Men who could turn murder into a pageant, massacres into a

fort of festivals, and exhibit the bleeding heads of innocent victims as spectacles of pleasure through the streets! If we view them in their legislative capacity, in the plenitude of their power, no scene that ever imagination drew, could depict so degenerate a state of human nature. They seem not to have any portion of that confidence without which, not even "confederacies in vice" can exist, though left free from the intervention of exterior power. They have manifested none of that *vicious* trust and guilty fidelity, which our immortal bard represents as preserving the league of infernal spirits in his Pandæmonium. One patriot seems to rise into power over the mangled corpse of his predecessor, and one general after another appears to take the sword only that he may "perish by the sword, or fall the miserable and degraded victim of a ferocious mob. But I will not expose myself to the danger of wearying your patience and outraging your humanity, by detailing crimes of so common and atrocious a nature, as daily pollute the pages of our journals. The imagination sickens with disgust in the contemplation on them, and too much familiarity may wear away that salutary indignation and instinctive horror, which ever should attend them.

Yet,

Yet, let us pause for a moment to consider the probable source of this unheard of depravity, this "blood guiltiness," which is not confined to a few individuals, but seems like a deluge, to have over-whelmed, and spread through a whole nation. Probably a variety of causes combined to produce this monster of iniquity, but among the foremost may we not rank the want of religion, and that vicious absurdity in philosophy called *Atheism*? The pure religion of Jesus had with them indeed, been enveloped in folly and superstition by the ignorance and bigotry of past ages; from the causeless dread of innovation, indifference on the part of the people, or the selfishness of those who turned the Gospel of Christ into gain, these abuses were suffered to continue, and the great variety that appeared in the discipline, dress and manners of life among the different communities of Christians might have created a doubt of the efficacy and authority of all: but vain and deluded men would not separate the grain from the chaff, the inestimable jewel of revealed religion from the incrustations and impurities which surround it. Hence vanity, or an affectation of "science falsely so called," led them to Deism; and from the vices and uncontrollable licentiousness of Deism the lapse into Atheism (for guilt is generally progressive) was natural and easy.

Here

Here let us stop, and with steadfast attention contemplate the entirely new scene which our enemies exhibit to our view. Let us consider them and their actions, their miseries and deplorable errors, as so many judgments of the Almighty on earth, (though produced by the ordinary operation of moral cause and effect) and in meditating on this awful lesson, may we as "inhabitants of the world learn righteousness."

Hitherto we have been enabled to view the professors of *atheism* and infidelity as forming only a trifling and insignificant number in the mass of civilized society; they have for the most part exhibited themselves to the world as a few isolated beings, (if I may be allowed the expression) whose *principles* the generality of mankind regarded with abhorrence, but whose *persons* the forbearance of Christian love taught them to protect from injury and violence. They had never possessed any power in a state either to legislate or govern: from a sacred regard to liberty, they were, in general, left to the enjoyment of their speculative opinions, and to magnify their own imaginary triumphs over the prejudice and ignorance of the times. We heard much of the truth of their tenets, and the purity of their principles. Human virtue and human wisdom were to be all-sufficient

cient without the aid of religion, or any of its sanctions. Man was represented as the slave of bigotry and superstition, and almost every crime and public calamity has been traced to religion as by some writers, or complicated with a stedfast belief in its doctrines and an outrageous zeal for its duties. Under the auspicious influence of reason, uncorrupted and unimpeded by religious prejudice, we were to see the golden age of human nature restored. Perfect laws, sublime virtues, extended science, lasting peace, in short, wisdom, liberty and happiness in every varied form, were to be the fruits of these philosophical teachers.

To such professions it is to be lamented that the young, the ignorant and vain have too often listened with satisfaction; and while their pride was flattered, their principles have been corrupted and their hearts betrayed. Men however of common understanding, and whose passions were not suffered to sophisticate or overpower their reason, could see with sufficient certainty the pernicious tendency of such a wretched system: but this was only the conviction of theory; it was argument without proof; assertion without facts to confirm it. It was reserved for the French nation to illustrate this important subject

ject by combining precept with example, speculation with practice. They have long sowed the destructive seed of infidelity, and are now reaping its harvest. As a novelty totally unexpected in the history of the human mind, they have produced a set of legislators totally without religion, and many without any belief in God. But where we might ask the pupil of modern philosophy, where is their liberty, their perfect toleration, their love of goodness, their wisdom and their virtues? Alas! these were the fruits of promise only.—“ Instead of the myrtle-tree, briars are come up.”—“ They looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness but behold a cry.” So far, indeed, are the vain and deceitful prospects of infidelity from being realized; that instead of the wisdom, virtue, and happiness held forth to our imagination, we behold folly in all its guilty excesses, vice in every disgusting shape, and misery and oppression beyond all former example!

In meditating on these awful events, let us regard them as “ the judgments of the Almighty in the earth,” calculated to impress men with the deepest reverence for his divine government, and, in the end, to teach them righteousness.

May we be convinced more fully than ever, that "religion is
 " the only anchor of the soul, which is both sure and stad-
 " fast." Let us rest assured that man is in this world more
 especially the child of discipline, and the fit subject of restraint.
 The wholesome lesson he needs is that of humility, not self ex-
 altation; and, instead of criminal indulgence, he has to fulfil
 the appropriate duties of self-denial as it regards himself, and
 active beneficence with respect to others. Under every possible
 combination of circumstances, be assured, increase of virtue is
 increase of happiness; and to render the virtues of man even
 tolerably consistent and efficacious, all the sanctions and restraints,
 all the encouragements and rewards of religion are necessary,
 superadded to other obligations.

You, therefore, who fill more exalted stations in society than
 many of your fellow-creatures, learn the high importance of a life
 of piety and virtue, both to yourselves and others. There will al-
 ways be enough of human frailty in the world to make men
 gaze, with some degree of envy or admiration, at those above
 them. This leads to imitation, even in matters of the slightest
 importance, as well as those of the highest concern; you,
 therefore, have in a great measure the power of rendering at-
 tendance on public worship (at least within the sphere of your
 personal influence) fashionable or not: You can communicate

a passion

a passion or a taste for indolence and luxury, or give additional recommendation to honest industry and frugal enjoyments. In short, you have the power in a thousand different ways, either to spread vice and folly, or promote virtue, wisdom, and happiness, by your countenance and example. Let me exhort you then, more especially when you return to your respective retirements, where your conduct is more narrowly observed, and more generally known, *to be yourselves what you wish others to be.* If you would see the mild virtues of Christianity spread through the circle of your authority, if you would behold them shine with distinguished lustre in the lives of your children, and if you would view around you faithful servants, chearful dependants and friendly neighbours, never neglect the duties of religion, nor violate the wholesome institutions of society. I do not mean to say that in all cases your good example would be successful; but it would never be without its benefits, and as far as relates to yourselves, we know it would be effectual. We know that an individual can do but the good of one; yet that will be proportioned to his efforts and his powers; but if every one that has superior influence from his rank and station were to exert himself for the good of the whole, human society would in a short time wear a very different aspect

aspect from what it is. To prevent degeneracy requires some vigilance and exertion, but the great work of gradual improvement, and advancing perfection, must be the effect of united endeavours and progressive ages. "Precept must be upon precept, and line upon line, here a little and there a little," as opportunity offers and occasion requires. May it thus be the great object of our lives to promote happiness by increasing virtue! Considering ourselves responsible to God and our own consciences for the proper use of every talent committed to our care, may our "light at all times so shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our father which is in Heaven!" but then, more particularly when such judgments of the Most High as at present arrest our attention, are in the earth, may we, with true humility, learn righteousness from them ourselves, and earnestly endeavour to communicate it to others.

F I N I S.

...from what it is. To prevent degeneracy requires some vigi-
lance and exertion, but the great work of gradual improvement,
and advancing perfection, must be the effect of united endeavours
and progressive ages. "I suspect must be upon precept, and
"line upon line, here a little and there a little," as opportunity
offers and occasion requires. May it thus be the great ob-
ject of our lives to promote happiness by increasing virtue! Con-
sidering ourselves responsible to God and our own consciences
for the proper use of every talent committed to our care, may we
be as lights at all times to one man that they may see
our good works and glorify our Father which is in Heaven!"
But when, more particularly when such judgments of the Most
High as at present attract our attention, are in the earth, may
we, with true humility, learn righteousness from them our
betters, and earnestly endeavour to communicate it to others.

